120th Anniversary
of the
1883 APH Building Dedication
June 12, 2003

On June 12, 1883, exactly 120 years ago, the first building of the American Printing House for the Blind was dedicated.

The Dedication Ceremony

On June 12, 1883 at 3 p.m., students of the Kentucky Institute for the Education of the Blind led a procession from the school to the new APH building. As reported in the next day's newspaper, they sang while marching "along the avenue and up the broad flight of stairs until the second story was reached, and in the large room, intended for the book-bindery, the services were held." Bishop T. U. Dudley opened the ceremony with a prayer, and William F. Bullock, President of the Board of Trustees, delivered a lengthy address. A letter from Congressman Albert S. Willis was read, followed by the students singing the "Hallelujah Chorus." The ceremony concluded with a benediction, and "the whole audience then repaired to the press-room, where Judge Bullock formally started the engines, the revolution of which meant so much happiness to humanity."

The 1883 Building

With funding from the state of Kentucky, the APH Board of Trustees purchased a 6.8-acre lot, west of the Kentucky School for the Blind, for $9,520 and built the 1883 building at an additional cost of $11,695.30. The building, designed by Louisville architect, Charles

Julian Clark, was built of brick and stone. It had a three-story front, a two-story wing, and a fireproof vault on the east side for storing stereotype plates. The newspaper account of the dedication described the building as the “first ever erected in the world for the sole purpose of printing for the blind . . . and in one of the prettiest sites that could be conceived of . . . in the center of a magnificent yard. . . . The building is a perfect one, in its construction, for the purposes it is to be applied to. On the ground floor is situated the office, press room and a stereotyping department. The second floor will be used as the packing and bookbinding department, and in the third story is situated the composing room. A large basement . . . gives ample room for all the apparatus necessary in an institution of this kind.”

What’s left of the 1883 building?

Numerous additions have been made to the 1883 building during the past 120 years, but remnants of the original structure are still evident. Two windows, a decorative column, and gaslight fixtures from the original building can be seen in the room where the dedication ceremony was held. Renovated in 1994, the room is now the reception area for the museum. Openings leading to additions on either side of the room show the thickness of the original exterior walls. A part of the outside wall at the north end of the room remains unchanged and is easily viewed from the museum director’s office. Parts of the 1883 exterior are also visible at the building’s east entry (near the cafeteria) and on the ground floor, near the museum’s “The Way We Worked” exhibit. The inscribed lintel that was over the original main entrance was

preserved and installed on the front lawn of APH in 1992.